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Fullbright
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6 May 1971

MEMORANDUM

The Pakistan Situation

1. East Pakistanis have long believed that West Pakistan treated them as colonials. West Pakistanis--especially those from the Punjab--have dominated the country's military and civil service, and most financial, industrial, and commercial power has been in the West. In the past decade, West Pakistan has seen a good deal of economic development, East Pakistan little. The Bengalis--who constitute over 90 percent of the people of East Pakistan--argue that their larger population--75 million to the West's 55 million--and the fact that their agricultural exports, particularly jute, earn over half of the country's foreign exchange, give them the right at least to run their own affairs.

2. In March 1970, President Yahya took Bangali grievances into account when he set up the Legal Framework Order--the Martial Law Administration's ground rules for returning Pakistan to civilian rule. Yahya gave East Pakistan a majority--169--of the 313 seats in the National Assembly, the body that was to write a new constitution. Yahya, however, reserved for himself the power to change the rules and to accept or reject the constitution.

3. Elections were originally scheduled for October 1970, but because of flooding in East Pakistan were postponed to December. In the meantime, East Pakistan was struck by a cyclone/tidal wave and the inadequate government relief effort further alienated the Bengalis. When elections to the constituent assembly were finally held, the Awami League of Mujibur Rahman won over 70 percent of the popular vote in East Pakistan and 167 of the 169 seats. The handful of league candidates in the four provinces of

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West Pakistan received only a token vote, as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by leftist ex - foreign minister Bhutto, won a majority of the seats there; regional, religious-oriented, or conservative parties took the rest.

4. In the negotiations that followed, President Yahya tried to encourage agreement between Bhutto, who wanted a fairly strong central government, and Mujib (as Mujibur Rahman is called), who refused to budge from his long-held position. This was embodied in a six-point program calling for an extreme form of provincial autonomy in which the central government would have control only of defense and foreign affairs, while all taxing power would be in the hands of the provinces.

5. Yahya called for a meeting of all party leaders in Dacca--East Pakistan's capital--but Bhutto refused to attend. Subsequently, on 1 March, the President postponed the National Assembly that had been scheduled to meet two days later.

6. Mujib reacted to the postponement of the National Assembly by calling for a general strike, which effectively hamstrung government operations in East Pakistan. On 6 March, Yahya gave in to Mujib to some extent, rescheduling the assembly for 25 March.

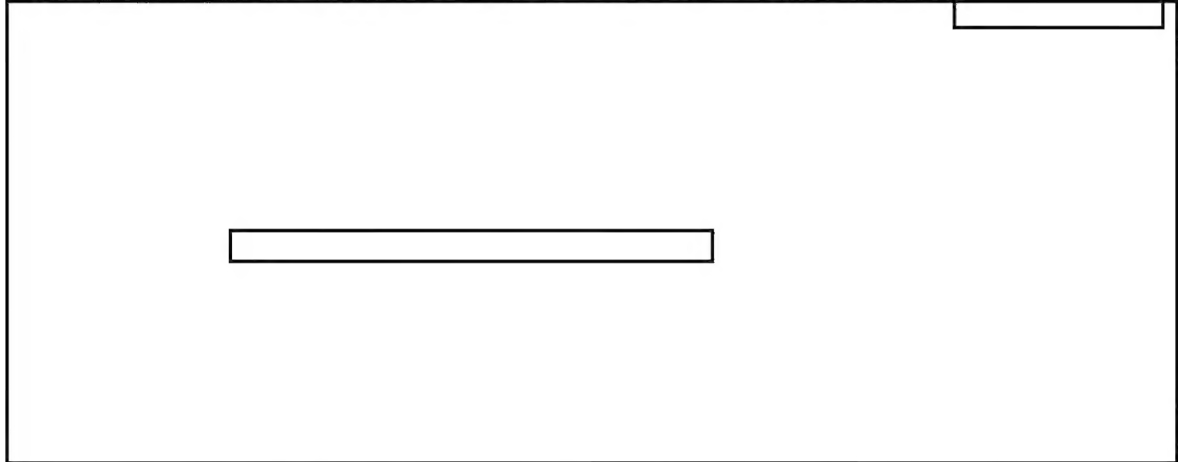
many of his followers expected him to proclaim East Pakistani independence, but instead he modified the general strike into what he called a "noncooperation movement." Within a few days, the movement had nullified central government authority and had put Mujib in de facto control of East Pakistan.

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7. On 16 March, Mujib and Yahya began a series of meetings in which Mujib refused to compromise [REDACTED]

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8. On 25 March, the army took over Dacca and arrested Mujib, who is now in prison in West Pakistan. Army units at other places in the province, however, remained in their cantonments, and in the next few days made only occasional raids into the surrounding areas. Bengali units of the regular army and most of the paramilitary forces in East Pakistan mutinied, killing many of their West Pakistani officers. There was extensive fighting in the southern port of Chittagong, with Bengali troops holding about a third of the city for over a week.

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10. Most of the wanton killing occurred in the first week as the army tried to eliminate potential trouble-makers, especially Awami League officials and dissident students. It attempted to cow potential rioters in Dacca by indiscriminate killing and burning in the poorer sections of the city. Hindu Bengalis--about 20 percent of the population--were subjected to a disproportionate amount of brutality, but it is not clear whether this was government policy or the responsibility of Hindu-hating Muslim army commanders on the scene.

11. In many Bengali-held areas of the country, similar killings and counterkillings were under way. At Mymensingh, where Bengalis ruled for about a month, nearly all Bihari males were killed. In Chittagong, Bengali mobs killed anyone thought to be non-Bengali. Revenge contributed to subsequent army actions but, on the whole, there seems to have been less wanton killing in the later stages of the campaign than in the first week.

12. Currently, the government holds most major towns and the major transportation routes. It does not have the men to move into all of the 62,000 villages, even though reinforcements over the past six weeks have raised government military strength in East Pakistan from about 20,000 to over 50,000 men. Bengali forces have been fragmented, and resistance for the time being is disorganized and scattered.

13. In West Pakistan, the government has enjoyed widespread support. Although Z. A. Bhutto disagrees strongly with the military leaders on social and economic policy, he does agree with them on national unity and therefore has backed the government. Most other politicians

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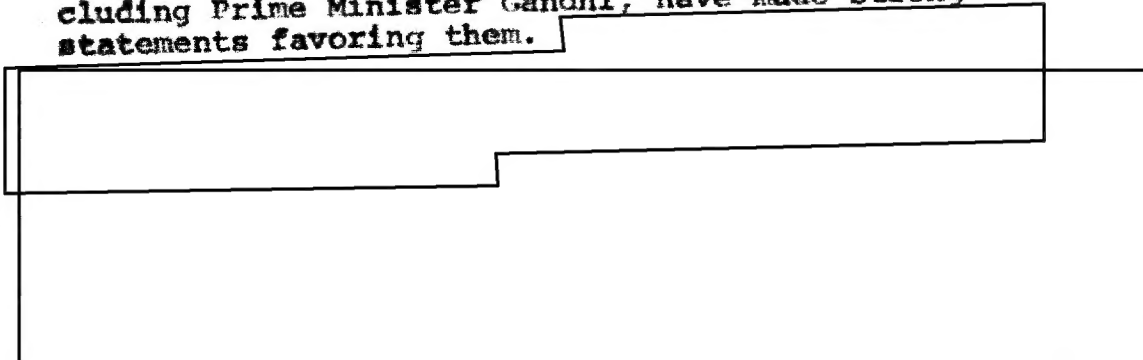
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have done the same, although a few have remained discreetly silent.

14. Meanwhile, Pakistan's economic problems are becoming increasingly serious. The financial and foreign exchange situation of the government has deteriorated, and it has had to postpone payments for six months on some foreign debts. In East Pakistan, economic activity has only begun to resume. Large parts of the transportation network are still not functioning, less than a third of the factories are operating, and ports are working at far below capacity. There is no famine yet, but most observers predict a severe food shortage in about four months.

15. The Indian Red Cross claimed this week that nearly one million East Pakistanis have fled to India. The figure may be inflated, but it is indicative of the size of the influx, which has been so great that India has called for foreign help.

16. The Indian Government--while stopping short of formal recognition--has given diplomatic support to the Bengalis, and top officials, including Prime Minister Gandhi, have made strong statements favoring them.



CHRONOLOGY

1970

30 March President Yahya promulgates Legal Framework Order.

7 December Awami League of Mujibur Rahman sweeps elections in East Pakistan for National Assembly tasked with writing new constitution.

17 December Awami League sweeps provincial assembly elections in East Pakistan.

1971

January-February Mujibur Rahman and Z. A. Bhutto meet in Dacca to try to resolve their differences over the provisions of new constitution.

1 March President Yahya, unable to obtain agreement among the politicians, postpones the National Assembly meeting scheduled for 3 March.

2 March Mujibur Rahman launches a general strike in East Pakistan, and martial law authorities place Dacca under night-time curfew in response to assorted acts of violence.

3 March Mujibur Rahman declines Yahya's call to attend a conference of East and West Pakistani political leaders in Dacca on 10 March.

6 March Yahya announces that the National Assembly will meet on 25 March to begin writing a constitution. He also names Tikka Khan, a tough West Pakistani general, as governor of East Pakistan.

7 March Mujibur Rahman announces his party will not attend the assembly unless Yahya first ends martial law and turns power over to elected representatives. Awami League launches a noncooperation movement that hamstringing central government activities in East Pakistan and gives Awami League de facto control over much of the province.

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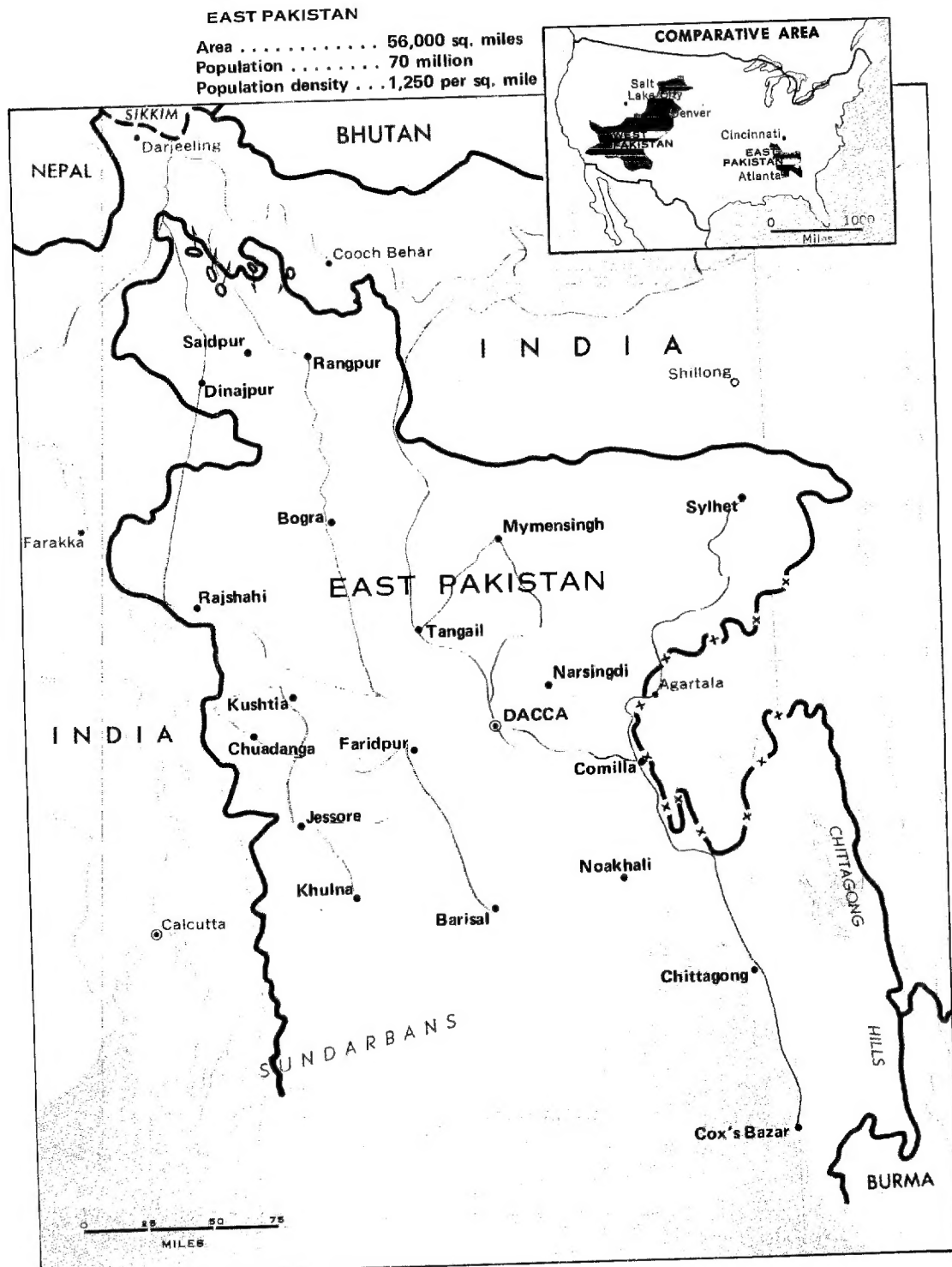
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15 March Mujibur Rahman announces his party has taken over administration of all East Pakistan except for Dacca, Comilla, and Jessore, and issues extensive directives to local officials. President Yahya arrives in Dacca.

16 March Discussions begin between Yahya and Mujibur Rahman in Dacca.

25-26 March After ten days of talks and some reports of progress, Pakistan Army abruptly seizes control of Dacca and begins offensive in East Pakistan.

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